



## National Fire Protection Association

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**Raymond B. Bizal, P.E.**  
*Western Regional Manager*

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State Building Code Council  
128 10<sup>th</sup> Ave SW  
PO Box 42525  
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Commissioners,

I urge you to keep the fire sprinkler requirement for new one- and two-family homes and townhomes in the International Residential Code (IRC), when you adopt the code as a state requirement.

With the publication of the 2009 IRC, now all national model codes addressing these occupancies require fire sprinklers for new one- and two- family homes and townhomes. This standard of care has been established for good reason: home fire sprinklers are proven to save lives and property.

The fire problem in the United States is in the home. Most important is life loss. Every year, around 80% of civilian fire fatalities are in the home (in 2008 it was 84%). This hovers close to 3,000 deaths in the home. On average, eight people died in U.S. home fires every day. You cannot put a cost on that loss. More people die in home fires each year, than all natural disasters combined annually. But, if you have a reported fire in your home, the risk of dying decreases by about 80 percent when fire sprinklers are present.

House fires can be fought, but often at a cost. There is a cost to the tax payers for deploying the fire department, and then there is a cost in the loss of life to firefighters. About 92% of firefighter fatalities on the fire ground occur fighting home fires.

People also can be injured in home fires. In 2008, nearly 13,600 civilians were injured in home fires. This can have a tremendous impact on families and the community. And this comes at a cost to families and to society.

Property damage can be more easily evaluated. In 2008, property loss reached \$8.5 billion in direct damage. But, people in homes with fire sprinklers are protected against significant property loss—fire sprinklers reduce the average property loss by 71 percent per fire.

Type of construction is not the answer, because the contents of the home will burn. Compartmentation is not the answer because smoke and toxic gases kill as well as heat from the fire itself. I will point out that smoke alarms have reduced fire deaths over the last few decades to a certain point, and remain an important element in home safety. But they are not enough, just as lap belts are not enough for automobile deaths.

Forty percent of home fire deaths resulted from fires in which no smoke alarms were present at all. And twenty three percent of the deaths were caused by fires in properties in which smoke alarms were present but failed to operate. Smoke alarms operated in fires that caused 37% of the deaths.

Home fire sprinklers are necessary if you want to reduce the number of fatalities, injuries and property loss.

Who supports the use of fire sprinklers in homes – the U.S. Fire Administration, FEMA, International Association of Fire Chiefs, International Association of Fire Fighters, National Volunteer Fire Fighters Association, National Association of State Fire Marshals, the Phoenix Society for Burn Survivors, to name a few organizations. Most importantly, the entire fire service community is rallying behind home fire sprinklers because they are the ones that witness the devastation of home fires in their communities on a daily basis.

The national standard of care has been established. We hope that you will not reduce the standard of care in Washington by removing the requirement that is in the national model code.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'RB Bizal', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Raymond B. Bizal, PE  
Western Regional Manager